

TIGER
IN THE
GRASS

Tiger in the Grass.
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THIS IS WHERE IT
BEGINS.

TIGER IN THE GRASS...

T i G E R

I N T h E

G R a S S

1. Prologue
2. October, in a Real Place
3. Tiger in the Grass: First Draft
4. Real Pain, in an Un-Real Place
5. Finale: "Thank you, Mr Tiger"
6. *Addendum: Journal Entry*

1. Prologue

March 20 2024, 3:26 AM

Underneath a waxing gibbous moon, I lay awake wondering about mysteries that exist beyond the universe in my mind. This is no rare occurrence. Ever since childhood, my gaze has been fixed upwards counting the stars that light up the night sky. Soon enough, merely counting stars made way for ruminating on my place among them. Even now, my nights are spent alone in my bedroom, perched upon my windowsill to look to anywhere else but here. I've always found it rather strange that something so vast and incomprehensible as the cosmos could lend such a profound comfort. This knowledge did not withhold me from indulging nonetheless. Something about the dark blue hues felt almost paradoxically warm. Maybe, if I focused my lifeless gaze on one of these dots for long enough, I'd eventually trap one inside of my eyes. Maybe then, I'd feel anything else besides this perpetual nothingness. Eventually, I would head to bed and fall into a deep slumber, and wake up feeling a bit colder every day. This is how days and nights usually seemed to pass.

Tonight was proving to turn out in much the same way, until —

There it was. A satellite, emitting a warm yellow glow. In the midst of the dark blue tapestry, a waxing gibbous moon humming a sweet lullaby. Illuminating the shadows of man ever so slightly, and doing so since the dawn of time. It is still March 20th. Sleep has evaded me for too long. I hear the Moon's soft song. I look outside. In the midst of it all, the moon. Despite everything, the moon. It sings a song. It lulls me to sleep. I wonder if someone else is listening too. Someone, somewhere, someplace.

I hope it's you.

This is where it begins.

2. October, in a Real Place

On October 30th 2023, I find myself sitting in front of a neglected cappuccino. By now, it's hardly lukewarm anymore, and for some reason, the taste feels wrong in my mouth. Grey thunderous clouds fill the sky. I feel like the more I gaze into them, the more I can feel them evoking a feeling of familiar melancholy. It is not a pain by any measure, but rather a growing void. Much like galaxies chase the Great Attractor, I can almost feel my body being moved towards introspection. It had been two years since this feeling first arose. One day, as I woke up, I sensed it. Somewhere, deep inside my body, an emptiness had appeared. It felt as if I had lost a piece of myself in a dream forever. Two years ago. And today, October 30th 2023, I think I am fully empty. I have been stirring this cappuccino for what must have been hours, and all I can think about is the fact that there is nothing there anymore. I only exist in a far away dream. Next to the cappuccino, a notebook. The date scrawled in a lonely corner.

Herein lies the greater torment of my emptiness. I never really know how to put it into writing anymore. It feels as if my mind no longer belongs to me, and I can only hold on to whatever words I find. Still, I feel the stories living inside of me. They pool underneath my fingernails and scratch at my fingertips. I hear them faintly buzzing in my ears. I hear them begging me to let them come to life, and I know I couldn't even if I wanted to. It is a great pain to be able to feel something rushing through your capillaries, only to fizzle out just before you are able to write it down. I haven't written anything in a long time. I lost it, as I've lost everything, to the unrelenting dream.

This does not stop me from trying almost desperately to let the words out. Many times, I find myself digging deep and rushing the writing, only to be disappointed at how the words then present themselves on the page. I wish the reason for this discrepancy had been more profound, but I know it to be caused by the simple fact that I do not write for myself. Not anymore. Every time I pick up a pen, or get in front of a keyboard, I imagine an audience. In this scenario, I am the entertainer tasked with keeping the audience on their toes. I see to it that I execute my job flawlessly. I make sure to use the most obscure vocabulary. I construct the most elaborate sentences. I always make the most astute observations. It is something like a drug. Nothing is more addicting than the feeling of anticipatory praise. Nothing will ever satisfy my hunger for perfection. When the curtain falls, I feel myself coming down from the high. Almost like walking out of a rave to see the sun rising, or accidentally staying up until you hear the morning chatter of birds. And I realise it's not me. It is never me.

One thing I have always excelled at, however, is coming up with titles to my work. Regardless of whether the work ends up being written, there is something soothing about it. In coming up with titles, I can put my ideas and thoughts and ponderings into neatly organised boxes. More often than not, I spend the late hours of the night imagining titles to pieces that end up never being written. I bring them to this world, and leave them with nothing but a name. In a way, the Documents folder on my laptop is a graveyard with no graves, only headstones. There are no corpses, no coffins, no sounds of grief. Just rows and rows of headstones with titles of long forgotten tales engraved in the granite, and chrysanthemums adorning the patches of grass in front of them. I am the only one to know of this place. I come here on days where the skies are grey, and look at all of the things I have ever wanted to say.

As rain starts to fall outside the café, something inside my soul breaks. At that instant, at that *precise* instant, I reach out to my notebook and write two sentences down.

Tiger in the Grass

This is where it begins.

On October 30th 2023, in front of a neglected cappuccino, I began to awaken from that far away dream. This piece will be called Tiger in the Grass. I hope I find out what it means soon.

3. Tiger in the Grass: First Draft

This is where it begins. It is October 30th 2023, and a rainy Monday which is nothing unusual. Most Mondays are rainy this time of year. Grey skies always evoke a feeling of melancholy and introspection to me. I suppose that is because they remind me of the Fire that lives within me. Deep inside the core of my body, I feel something burning. This is not a fire that brings people together, nor is it a fire that will warm up cold hands. It is a fire that withers and destroys. It dries me out. It cracks my skin. I try to run away from it. I sleep for a lot longer. And I dream whenever I'm awake as well. In these dreams, I find myself travelling to another plane of consciousness. In this place, the Other World, there are no grey skies and no fires that eat away at my soul. Only a grass plain that reaches out for hundreds and thousands and millions of miles under a blue, slightly clouded sky. The Sun shines vigorously and yet, it is never uncomfortably hot. In fact, I imagine there to be a constant refreshing breeze, almost like a perpetual mid-May afternoon. In this Other World, there is absolutely nothing keeping me on the ground, so I fly. I fly and

fly and fly some more. I duck and dash and dive through the blades of grass, run my fingers through the clouds, not worrying about being careful and vigilant and everything I have to be in the Real World. I fly until I can't feel my heart withering. One of Life's harshest truths, however, is that you can't fly forever. At some point, we all have to touch the ground. And just like that, I find myself back here. A rainy Monday. October 30th. And I'm documenting a destruction I have only myself to blame for. This is the Real World. Everything is here. All the love, all the stories, all the heartbreak, all the joy, all the pain, everything anyone has ever felt. No matter how much I dream, I always find myself having to come back here. All who dream eventually have to wake up. All who fly must eventually touch the ground.

4. Real Pain, in an Un-Real Place

Why would any professor dedicate an entire three-hour lecture to discussing the intricacies of early modern architecture? This is the last thought I remember myself having. Bored with expressionism and tired from a night of paradoxically sleepless slumber, I blink. I blink once, and then twice. And when I open my eyes, I am surrounded by blues and greens and light. So much light. This was the Other World. In this world, the Sun shone and it was always a mid-May afternoon. I knew these things, or rather, I took these things for granted. This is how it had always been. And then I heard it. The rustling of a bush behind me. In-between the blades of grass, hidden from plain sight, a flash of orange. In the Real World, orange was one of those things I could take for granted. I consumed my fair share of the color throughout my life. In here, it seemed an impossibility—an abnormality unlike any I had ever witnessed before. Slowly but surely, I began walking towards the sound, until I recognised what was unmistakably a tiger. I stopped. A tiger? It walked towards me, and then it spoke. In the Real World, tigers weren't

supposed to talk. Any normal person would faint at the sight of a talking tiger, but this was not the Real World. Thus, the tiger spoke.

“You... brought something here, didn’t you?”

His voice was deep and clear like a mountain stream making its way down, yet his mouth did not move. It sounded like it came from inside my head, but somehow I knew that it was indeed this tiger who had spoken these words. For a moment, a long moment, I was too stunned to conjure up a reply.

“You brought it here. And now, you must bring it back. Such is the way of this World.”

“I’m sorry. Who are you again? What exactly did I bring here? I didn’t even know I could bring anything inside of this place.”

“I will show you.”

The tiger stretched his right arm and carefully placed his paw on my heart. A deep warmth radiated from his paw into my body. Then, ever so carefully, he pressed a single claw into my chest. I squeezed my eyes shut, afraid that seeing it happen would make it hurt even more. All I could feel was the tiger’s warm paw pushing into me. Strangely enough, it did not feel quite as painful as I thought it would. In fact, his claw met no resistance piercing my heart, almost like cold butter to a warm knife. Almost instantaneously, however, the tiger snatched his claw back and I was met with the most excruciating pain I have ever felt in my life. I screamed. My vision went blank. My ears started ringing. I thought the tiger had all but eviscerated my body and left me bleeding in the fields, hot red blood on green plains. I opened my eyes again. My body had remained unscathed. There was no blood to be seen, no entry marks on my chest, no proof that the tiger had clawed inside of my heart. His eyes remained fixed on me, unwavering. He presented his paw to me once more. A grey

thread hung loosely on one claw. It reminded me of a spider's silk; sticky, and delicate yet rigid. It emanated a mysterious light, almost as if it were alive. Something about the way it flowed reminded me of a place somewhere. Before I could ask, as if he read my mind, the tiger spoke.

"This is yours. All the Pain you have been carrying. The burning in your heart. This is it. You brought it here, and you must bring it back."

And then, I laughed. I laughed and laughed and laughed. I laughed so hard I thought I could die. Until my throat felt scratchy and my belly ached. Until I could barely breathe anymore. And then I cried. I cried and cried and cried. I cried for what felt like hours. Until my voice grew hoarse and my muscles ached. Until I could barely breathe anymore. All the Pain. All the suffering. This dark, withering feeling inside of my soul. All of it was nothing more than a—

"A stupid, insignificant silk thread, indeed." He spoke. "That does not make it any less real. This insignificant thread holds the very Pain that has tormented you for years. Have you not been in Pain? Have you not suffered? Why do you think you created this World in the first place? Here. Take it and bring it back to where it belongs."

"But... why? Why can't I just leave it here with you? If I take it back, that means I'll have to live with it inside of my body again. You keep it."

"I cannot."

Before I could ask, he interjected.

"Because such is the way of this World. This Other World, this dream of yours, it can only exist if you keep your Pain in the Real World where it was born. In this dream, there is none, but only because it lives when you are awake. One must know Pain, feel

how it burns, know how it stings. Only then can one truly feel free of it. Without Pain, this world cannot exist. Look at yourself. You are already fading into nothingness. You must take it back — and fast.”

As the tiger said this, he nodded at my left arm. Upon lifting my arm, I saw but an outline of what used to be there. I could vaguely see green blades of grass on the other side. The tiger was right. I was fading away. Slowly but surely, I was becoming transparent, losing myself to the dream, until nothing would remain. I felt like crying, but I was all out of tears.

“If I knew how to live with my Pain, don’t you think I would have done so already, Mr. Tiger? I am tired. I am tired of feeling it course through my veins, eating away at everything that makes me human, making me sick. I am so tired, all the time. I want to sleep. I want to exist without feeling like I’m being swallowed whole. Please, Mr. Tiger, please tell me. How do I stop feeling like this?”

Mr. Tiger lifted his paw for a last time. My Pain still swirled around his claws.

“Do what you have always done. Write. Write about anything and everything that comes to your mind. Write until you can no longer feel it living inside of your body. Don’t run from your Pain — feel it. Feel all of it. Taste it on your tongue, hear its cries, feel the way it glides down your spine, and then write it down to feel free of it. If nothing else, write. You will see. Once you have written things down, it will be easier. I must go now. Good luck.”

A warm paw pressed against my chest for a last time. Just like before, he pushed a single claw into my heart, and along with it, the grey thread. It did not hurt. My vision went blank. My ears ringed. I woke up. I blink.

This is still my lecture hall. A single tear is sliding across my cheek. I wipe it away. I browse to my Documents folder. I pick up the chrysanthemums. I dust off the headstone.

In front of me, a blank white page, save for four lonely words.

Tiger in the Grass

My professor had moved on to Art Deco by now. I begin typing.

This is where it begins.

5. Finale: Thank You, Mr. Tiger

February 9 2025, 9:17PM

It is February 9th of 2025 and I am on the train. As of late, my mind has been undergoing some sort of change. In five days from now, I'll be celebrating my birthday. And much like every year before this one, this birthday feels individually remarkable. It always feels like this one is going to be the one that finally brings about the change I've been waiting for. Finally I will wake up in the morning, a year older than the day before, and as I stretch my arms and take in the first rays of sunlight; I will feel it. The unimaginable bliss of feeling like I understand everything at last. I will know no more sadness. My belt loop will never again get caught on the door handle of my bedroom. My morning coffee will forever be the perfect temperature, not too hot and definitely not too cold. My shoelaces will have magically untied themselves every morning, and I can walk - not run, walk - out the door

without feeling like I'm in a race against the hands of the clock. For the first time in my life, I will feel as light as air. I will feel everything, constantly flowing, in the same way that a mountain stream makes its way down forever. These are the things I dream about. As I hold my pen to the paper and I conjure up fantasies about a place better than here, these are the things that enter my mind. Every year, right before my birthday and only then, my thoughts are of liberation. I hold my breath at 11:59 PM. The first breath I take into my new year is as much exasperated as it is disappointed.

But now, on February 9th 2025, it is suddenly abundantly clear to me what I need to do. I have spent too much of my life living in fantasies. Unlike every year before this one, I have grown tired of orchestrating my own disappointment. I have grown tired of never giving anything, and expecting everything in return. I have grown tired of dreaming about a life instead of living it.

Yes — it is very clear now.

February 11 2025, 6:54 PM

It is cold, and I'm smoking the last cigarette in my pack. In a matter of seconds I flick my lighter, light the cig and take a long drag. Cigarette clenched between my lips, I return my lighter to my right pocket with the same cold-blooded professionalism as a hitman. I blow out the smoke. The city feels strangely empty from this balcony. Somehow, a part of me feels like it's not here. Somehow, the world seems to have stopped. Inside, a King

Crimson song is softly playing. I take my time finishing the cigarette, and I spend a while pondering on how metaphorical that is. After what seems like eternity, I blow out the smoke of my last drag. The wind drags it up and away and before long, it is completely out of sight. As I make my way indoors, I return to my seat and let my fingers hover over the keyboard just slightly. In front of me, at long last, the final edit of Tiger in the Grass. I reread the epilogue one last time.

It is very clear now. I must write. That's what Mr. Tiger said I should do. No longer will I allow myself or my pain to stand in the way of what I know to be true: I desperately want to live life. I want to taste it on my tongue, feel it underneath my fingertips, hear it pounding against my eardrums. I want nothing more than to live, fully and unabashedly. I choose, now and forever, to live alongside pain, because pain is what makes me human. This pain I've been carrying, this little grey thread, I will carry it in my heart forever. I will remember the way it stung, and the way it made my throat grow hoarse from crying. I will remember everything, and I will live in spite of it all. I will never be able to liberate myself from this pain, but I know I can liberate myself from suffering. But first, I must write. I need to leave something here in order to get something in return.

I take a deep breath. I close my eyes. Somewhere, deep inside, I see green meadows as far as my eyes can reach slowly fading. Clouds start to dissolve into nothingness. There is nothing left for me in this Other World. As the sun sets, the Un-Real plains succumb first to transparency and then to oblivion. I feel peace. I need to leave something in order to get something in return.

“When I leave tomorrow, I’ll be crying,” Greg Lake sings. “Such is the way of this world,” I say.

Somewhere, a tiger speaks: “Such is the way of this world.”

I look out the window. A waxing gibbous moon hangs amidst an ocean of dark blue hues. I know it’s you.

Thank you, Mr. Tiger.

You’re welcome, I say.

6. Addendum: Journal Entry

This is where it ends.

I'VE BEEN FEELING
NUMB. OR MAYBE I SHOULD
SAY; SHORT OF ALIVE. I WONDER
IF THIS IS THE RIGHT WAY 2
BE FEELING. THE OTHER WORLD
IS BETTER - BUT IT ISN'T REAL.
IT'S UN-REAL. I CAN'T
BRING MY PAIN 2 A PLACE BUILT
ON THE FANTASY / PRINCIPLE
OF PAIN NOT EXISTING. BUT
IF I ACKNOWLEDGE THE PAIN
IN THE REAL WORLD - THAT
WOULD SHATTER THE SAME
PRINCIPLE. THIS OTHER WORLD...
IT SHOULDN'T EXIST. NO.
I SHOULDN'T EXIST THERE.
GOD, I NEED 2 WRITE.
I NEED TO WRITE SO I
CAN FINALLY BE FREE.
YES.
THIS IS WHERE IT ENDS.